Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): Microparticles comprising at least one active agent embedded within a biocompatible, biodegradable polymeric matrix, wherein said microparticles are prepared by a process comprising the steps of combining at least one active agent and biocompatible, biodegradable polymer with an ionic liquid and removing said ionic liquid, wherein said ionic liquid is a molten salt.

Claim 2 (original): The microparticles according to claim 1 wherein the ionic liquid has essentially no vapor pressure.

Claim 3 (currently amended): The microparticles according to claim [[5]] 1 wherein the ionic liquid has a vapor pressure of less than about 1 mm/Hg at 25° C.

Claim 4 (original): The microparticles according to claim 1 wherein the ionic liquid is selected from the group consisting of: an imidazolium salt, pyridium salt, ammonium salt, phosphonium salt and sulphonium salt.

Claim 5 (original): The microparticles according to claim 1 wherein the ionic liquid is selected from the group consisting of: 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 1-hexyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 1-octyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 1-decyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 1-dodecyl-3-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-trifluorosulfonate, 1-butyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-trifluorosulfonate, 1-ethyl-3-methylimidazolium bis((trifluoromethyl)sulphonyl)-imidate, 1-hexyl-3-methylimidazolium bis((trifluoromethyl)sulphonyl)amide, 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-trifluoroacetate, 1-butyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-trifluoroacetate, 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-tetrafluoroborate, 1-hexylpyridinium tetrafluoroborate, 1-octylpyridinium tetrafluoroborate, 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium tetrafluoroborate, 1-methy-3-ethyl imidazolium chloride, 1-ethyl-3-butyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-butyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-butyl imidazolium bromide, 1-octyl-3-methyl-imidazolium-bromide, 1-methy-3-propyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-hexyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-octyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-decyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-dodecyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-hexadecyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-octadecyl imidazolium chloride, 1-methy-3-octadecyl imidazolium chloride, ethyl pyridinium bromide, ethyl pyridinium chloride, ethylene pyridinium dibromide, ethylene pyridinium dichloride, butyl pyridinium chloride, benzyl pyridinium bromide, and mixtures thereof.

Claim 6 (original): The microparticles according to claim 1 wherein the polymer is a co-polymer of poly(glycolic acid) and poly(D,L-lactic acid).

Claim 7 (original): The microparticles according to claim 1 wherein the active agent is selected from the group consisting of a peptide, protein, hormone, analgesic, anti-migraine agent, anti-coagulant agent, narcotic antagonist, chelating agent, anti-anginal agent, chemotherapy agent, sedative, anti-neoplastic, prostaglandin and antidiuretic agent, cerebral stimulant, pain management agent, antalkaloid, cardiovascular drug and agent for treating rheumatic condition.

Claim 8 (original): The microparticles according to claim 7 wherein the peptide or protein is selected from the group consisting of insulin, calcitonin, calcitonin gene-regulating protein, parathyroid hormone, GLP-1, atrial natriuretic protein, colony-stimulating factor, GM-CSF, betaseron, erythropoietin, α-interferon, α-interferon, γ-interferon, human growth hormone, octreotide, somatropin, somatotropin, somastostatin, somatomedins, luteinizing hormone releasing hormone, tissue plasminogen activator, growth hormone releasing hormone, oxytocin, estradiol, growth hormones, leuprolide acetate, factor VIII, interleukin-2, interleukin-3, interleukin-6, interleukin-14, and analogues and antagonists thereof.

Claim 9 (cancelled)

Claim 10 (withdrawn – currently amended): A method for preparing microparticles comprising (i) dissolving or dispersing an active agent in a biocompatible, biodegradable polymer; (ii) dissolving the polymer containing the active agent in an ionic liquid, wherein said ionic liquid is a molten salt; and (iii) removing the ionic liquid to form microparticles.

Claim 11 (withdrawn – currently amended): A method for preparing microparticles comprising (i)[[']] dissolving or dispersing an active agent in an ionic liquid, wherein said ionic liquid is a molten salt; (ii)[[']] dissolving the ionic liquid containing the active agent in a biocompatible, biodegradable polymer; and (iii)[[']] removing the ionic liquid to form microparticles.

Claim 12 (withdrawn – currently amended): A method for preparing microparticles comprising (i)[["]] dissolving or dispersing an active agent in a biocompatible, biodegradable polymer and an ionic liquid to form a mixture, wherein said ionic liquid is a molten salt; (ii)[["]] adding a solvent and at least one surfactant to the mixture; and (iii)[["]] removing the ionic liquid to form microparticles.

Claim 13 (withdrawn – currently amended): A method for preparing microparticles comprising (i)[["']] dissolving or dispersing a biodegradable polymer in an ionic liquid, wherein said ionic liquid is a molten salt; (ii)[["']] emulsification of the resulting solution in a lipophilic

phase; (iii)[["']] adding a solution of an active agent to the emulsion to form microparticles, and (iv)[["']] removing the ionic liquid.

Claim 14 (withdrawn): The method according to claim 12 wherein the surfactant is selected from the group consisting of a reaction products of a natural or hydrogenated castor oil and ethylene oxide, polyoxyethylene-sorbitan-fatty acid esters, polyoxyethylene fatty acid esters, polyoxyethylene-polyoxypropylene co-polymers and block co-polymers, dioctylsulfosuccinate or di-[2-ethylhexyl]-succinate, phospholipids, propylene glycol mono- and di-fatty acid esters, polyoxyethylene alkyl ethers, tocopherol esters, and docusate salts and combinations thereof.

Claim 15 (withdrawn): The method according to claim 12 wherein the solvent is selected from the group consisting of an alkyl acetate, lower alkyl alcohol, aliphatic C_{6-12} hydrocarbon, aromatic hydrocarbon, dialkyl ketone, dialkyl ether, and combinations thereof.

Claim 16 (withdrawn): The method according to claim 13 wherein the lipophilic phase is selected from the group consisting of liquid paraffins, silicon oils, mixtures of middle-chain triglycerides, oleic acid oleoyl esters and combinations thereof.